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ABSTRACT

The Eastern Michigan University Staff Development for School Improvement Program (SDSI) has involved over 25 school districts and 60 schools within the Detroit Metropolitan area since 1978. This program offers teachers a process for planning their own professional development, with a view toward improving the instructional environment and teacher effectiveness within their schools. The essence of the SDSI concept: (1) puts the emphasis on staff development in order to achieve school improvement; (2) focuses on needs as defined and addressed by teachers within their particular building; (3) provides structure and direction through a clearly defined six-step process; and (4) involves collaboration between the local district, the university, intermediate school districts, and the Michigan Department of Education. This paper describes the process of training selected faculty members to be leaders or facilitators of school-based projects. (JD)

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PREPARING LEADERS FOR EFFECTIVE STAFF DEVELOPMENT

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PREPARING LEADERS FOR EFFECTIVE STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

Eastern Michigan University is completing its eighth year in conducting a demonstration staff development program which had its origin in 1976 within the Taylor School District. The Eastern Michigan University Staff Development for School Improvement Program (SDSI) has involved over twenty-five school districts and sixty schools within the Detroit Metropolitan area since 1978. During this period a number of refinements have been made in the program and in the process for preparing personnel to serve as staff development leaders in the schools. Clear evidence now exists to show that an effective staff development program requires the use of a plan which includes a leadership training component. The training should assure that the guiding principles for staff development programs are properly interpreted and applied, if the model is to become institutionalized. It requires an ongoing effort utilizing the many and varied resources of the state department of education, the university, the intermediate (county) school district and the local district.

The Staff Development for School Improvement Program (SDSI) offers teachers a process for planning their own professional development, with a view toward improving the instructional environment and teacher effectiveness within their schools. The essence of the SDSI concept (1) puts the emphasis on staff development in order to achieve school improvement, (2) focuses on needs as defined and addressed by teachers within their particular building, (3) provides structure and direction through a clearly defined six-step process, and (4) involves collaboration between the local district, Eastern Michigan University, intermediate (county) school districts and the Michigan Department of Education.

The Staff Development Process

The process used in conducting SDSI projects involves the sequential completion of six steps through the collective efforts of a school staff and guiding assistance of a university facilitator. The six steps are:

Step I AWARENESS, READINESS, AND COMMITMENT: The school staff is made aware of the six-step SDSI model and the opportunities it affords them to plan and direct their own staff development program. They are asked to make a commitment to carry out a project. At least 75 percent of the staff must accept involvement if the project is to proceed to the next step.

Step II INTERACTIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT: A special needs assessment session is conducted by a university facilitator with the entire school staff in an effort to have them identify and agree upon school needs which can be fulfilled through staff development efforts. The outcome of this session is a priority goal and objectives which will provide direction for the project. At this point a building committee (Building Leadership Team) is selected to provide the coordinating leadership for the project.

Step III THE PLAN AND ITS APPROVAL: Using the priority goal and objectives identified in the needs assessment, the BLT prepares a project plan. Additional input on project strategies and activities is obtained from the staff for the plan. Project plans are written for the period of one academic year and must be approved by the school administration, the school staff and the university.

Step IV IMPLEMENTATION: The project as described in the plan is carried out under the leadership of the BLT and with the supporting assistance of the school principal and university facilitator. Through regular meetings of the BLT, it is able to monitor project progress and budget expenditures and prepare periodic progress reports.

Step V REPORTING AND EVALUATION: Documentation of the project activities is important to determination of the fulfillment of its objectives and its overall impact on the school. The staff keeps records of all activities and provides the input for a final evaluation report on the project. Evaluation involves both quantitative and qualitative factors related to the effect of the project on teachers, students, the school and the community.

Step VI ADOPTION: The adoption of new procedures or practices developed through the project is desired. However, the institutionalization of the six-step process is hoped for as much as the adoption of desired changes. At the conclusion of a project, it is intended that the SDSI process by recycled beginning with step two--an interactive reassessment of needs.

Types of Staff Development Leaders

The leadership development process, which has evolved as a result of implementing sixteen local school SDSI projects annually through Eastern Michigan University, involves several levels of leaders. On campus a select group of faculty members has been prepared to be "facilitators" of the school-based projects. While the university facilitators may or may not be teacher educators, they must have experience, however, in working with K-12 schools and a strong interest in staff development. They

serve as the link between the university and the local district. District level coordinators of staff development provide the connection between school district central administration and schools which serve as project sites. Within a school the principal and a staff development committee or Building Leadership Team (BLT) carry the primary responsibility for implementing their own project. The preparation of each of these groups to be staff development leaders requires from one to three years of involvement in a variety of activities which take place on the university campus and in local districts.

Teachers in project schools who serve on the SDSI building committee assume a very important leadership role. They must work to promote the involvement of all teachers in the satisfactory completion of the project goal and objectives, and oversee its general administration. Preparation for membership on the Building Leadership Team (BLT) begins with an orientation to SDSI offered to all teachers by the university facilitator. Upon selection to the BLT more specific instructions are made available through regular meetings of the team with the facilitators--usually biweekly. Assistance with proposal writing, the identification of project resources and the development of project management procedures is provided through these meetings.

The BLTs of all projects participate in two special half-day on-campus workshops held in October and March each year. This affords opportunities for group sharing on project experiences and offers a forum for discussion of procedures and problems. A Year-End Celebration is held on campus in May with each BLT invited to prepare a display of their school project. Through this activity they receive special recognition for their efforts as a team, and for their school as a participating SDSI project site.

One on-campus conference is presented exclusively for school superintendents, principals and district coordinators of staff development. Each district is invited to bring school board representatives with them to the conference. The general focus of this conference is upon the broader issues of staff development management and support for school project activities.

In view of the need today for increased staff development efforts in schools, greater attention must be given to the preparation of leaders who can direct the comprehensive planning and activities for staff development programs. Research indicates that school-based staff development approaches are more likely to result in school improvement than other approaches. The most readily available source for effective leaders of staff development programs is the faculty in those schools. Adding the dimension of "teacher-directed" to school-based approaches offers each greater assurance that the staff development program will result in significant change (improvement) in schools.

Staff development leaders need not be regular or appointed administrators in a school district, if the scope of their involvement is limited to two or three different school programs or projects. They may in fact be teachers who are on a release-time schedule for up to one-half a school day. In effect, they become facilitators of staff development projects, who guide the efforts of the faculty in schools in their own staff development program.

Preparing District Level Facilitators

Through the collaborative efforts of Eastern Michigan University and the Monroe County Intermediate School District in Michigan, a special staff development leadership program was conducted during the Winter, 1985, for personnel from five Monroe County school districts and the Monroe ISD. Coordinators of the College of Education's Staff Development for School Improvement (SDSI) program at Eastern Michigan University, working with the Monroe ISD Assistant Superintendent, conducted a series of workshops to prepare staff development facilitators for the Dundee, Jefferson, Bedford, Monroe, Erie-Mason and intermediate school districts. Participants were selected to attend by local building administrators because of their expressed interest in staff development and leadership potential. The participants were aware they might facilitate staff development projects to be initiated in the fall, 1985, based on the preparation they received through the Monroe County Facilitator Development Program provided by the EMU-SDSI coordinators.

The five full-day facilitator workshop sessions followed a format similar to that of the staff development model being used in the SDSI program. Participants not only heard descriptions of the six-step SDSI program, but they were also actively involved in developing a staff development plan. Session I, "Awareness" provided participants with an overview of the rationale, principles and philosophy on which the SDSI program is based and principles of effective change. Session II, entitled "Interactive Needs Assessment" offered a review of essential human relationship skills prior to conducting an interactive needs assessment and discussion opportunities for program participants. Techniques for establishing effective building leadership teams (BLT) were reviewed prior to encouraging participants to do some preliminary planning before the third session. During Session III, the interactive needs assessment was revisited, the project plan format introduced, and participants were given the opportunity to write a project plan using a variety of resources and based on their goal as identified through the interactive needs assessment process. Session IV, "Building Based Projects" offered participants the opportunity to hear about and discuss the facilitator role with two visiting local district and school-based facilitators. The afternoon was devoted to visitation of three building-based

project sites, talking with administrators, BLT chairpersons, and teachers. Session V, "Evaluation" provided a review of the total six-step process while emphasizing the importance of consistant evaluation and reporting of project objectives, activities, and outcomes. Administrators from participating districts were invited to attend the afternoon session, which described the future plans for the Monroe County Facilitator Development Program.

Six building-based projects using facilitators trained through the Monroe Facilitator Development Program have been initiated since September 1985. Through an additional contract with the Monroe Intermediate School District, technical assistance was provided to the district facilitators and their local building leadership teams. Following awareness sessions conducted by the facilitators, an SDSI coordinator conducted the interactive needs assessment and provided followup assistance to building leadership teams in writing the project plan and developing implementation strategies. When the project plan was completed, the SDSI coordinator provided support primarily through telephone contacts and occasional visitations.

Monthly meetings have been held with the Monroe facilitators which focused on topics such as implementing the six-step process, maintaining staff interest, and improving interpersonal skills. Facilitators have attended leadership training activities sponsored by the EMU-SDSI program and two facilitators presented their projects at a statewide staff development conference. Three additional schools plan to initiate staff development projects in September 1986. A second phase of the Monroe Facilitator Development Program is being developed and Phase I is being replicated.

Conclusion

The preparation of leaders for staff development programs supported by Eastern Michigan University is an ongoing process, for as a school moves toward more complete institutionalization of the SDSI six-step process in their building, more and more teachers learn to accept and share leadership roles. Greater individual initiative and personal responsibility is assumed by teachers as they experience success in the process of implementing staff development activities with their peers. The Monroe Facilitator Development Program is cultivating new prospective leaders for future projects. The cadre of expertise initiated through the program is and will continue to serve both district and intermediate school district staff development needs well. Leadership skills are translated into more effective personal/professional skills and more effective schools.